

Just A Regular Guy Tattoo-U

Mark MacDonald

Let me introduce myself. I am a bisexual male, and a student attending the University of Prince Edward Island.

Surprised? Don't be. Homosexuality and bisexuality are a lot more common on this little Island than most people realize or admit.

I was born on Prince Edward Island, as were both of my parents. So the myth that all gays on PEI have "come from away" just isn't true.

I had a normal childhood. I had lots of friends, both male and female. I had a happy family, with parents who showed me a lot of love. I was good in school, I was good in sports, I was everything a little boy was supposed to be.

Then I hit puberty and things changed. Just about the time that all the other boys in my classes were starting to notice certain things about the girls, I was starting to notice certain things about the boys.

At first it didn't bother me. I thought the feelings were just a part of maturing sexually. When I realized that not everyone else was having the same feelings as me I was horrified.

I had grown up hearing unflattering things about homosexuals. They were supposed to be effeminate, perverted, and child-molesters. I wondered what I had done to be afforded such a fate in life.

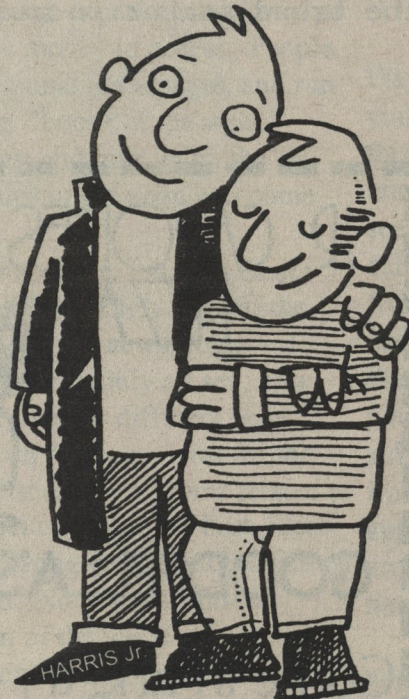
I felt like life was hopeless for me, and I plunged into a deep introverted depression. I was the same person on the outside, but inside I was struggling with feelings of self-hate, denial and despair. This, compounding the usual low self-esteem experienced during adolescence.

This depression lasted for years, though I never let anyone else know about it. I still continued to do well in school. I dated just like

everyone else, mostly out of fear that other people would discover my deep, dark secret.

After I graduated from high school, I came to university here at UPEI. As I entered my later teens, rational thought was finally a possibility, and I decided that I didn't care what peoples views of homosexuals were. I was going to be the best person that I could be, regardless of my sexual preference.

With this new resolve, I began to investigate the resources available



to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and other "queers" (LGBQ) on PEI. I phoned the Gay and Lesbian Support Line, and I also started searching out news-groups on the internet which had homosexual and bisexual support as themes. Both of these avenues provided much needed advice, and helped me realize that I was not alone.

The turning point in my life came when I took a summer job out west. I moved to a city where I knew absolutely no one, and I knew right away that this would be my

chance to explore my sexuality for the first time. It is a simple fact that it is much easier to be homosexual if you are away from the place where you grew up. Anonymity is a blessing.

After the first month of getting settled in and used to my job, I began to explore whole-heartedly. I joined a local LGBQ youth group, and started to frequent the gay establishments of the city. What a liberating experience it was associating with other people my age who had similar interests and life experiences as me!

It was during this summer that I realized that I was bisexual instead of purely homosexual. I fell in love for the first time, but with a woman instead of a man. I had been so worried about people finding out that I was gay when I was younger that I had suppressed any type of attraction that I had felt for anyone. Finding love was exhilarating and beautiful and it filled a void in my life that had been long vacant.

Now that I am home again I have continued to assert my sexuality. I now attend bi-weekly discussion groups hosted by Island Rainbow, PEI's LGBQ association, and I go to dances specifically meant for LGBQ's. I have told my parents and several close friends of my sexual preference, and the response has been unexpectedly pleasant. My life has not shattered because of people finding out, as I had once thought it might.

I am proud of the person that I have become. I have few regrets. My only hope is that some day it won't be as difficult for a queer teenager on PEI to realize their potential as a person as it was for me.

The phone number for the
Gay and Lesbian Support
Line is: 566-9733

A. Chisholm

Only sailors and bikers get tattoos, right? Wrong. Tattoos have been around for hundreds of years although their popularity waxes and wanes. I have wanted one for a long time, but I wasn't sure it was a good idea.

It was a difficult decision to make, since a tattoo is a lifetime commitment. While it is possible to surgically remove one, the process is expensive and painful, and a scar is usually left behind.

Earrings can be removed, dye will wash out of your hair and clothes are easily changed. A tattoo is a permanent artistic statement. Imagine trying to explain to your husband "Joe" why "Bob" is written across your butt. My number one rule is, regardless of your commitment never tattoo a name anywhere on your anatomy.

The majority of shops will not tattoo you if you are under 18, or if you are drunk. However, there are always exceptions. Actress Ellen DeGeneres once completely covered her legs with tattoos of flowers, which is why she will no longer wear a skirt.

Once I made the big decision, I had to find a reputable shop and artist. PEI has no regulations covering tattoo shops, only a series of recommendations which are not enforceable. Since I was spending the summer in Kingston, Ontario, I decided to find a shop there.

I spoke with the owner and she discussed the procedure with me and showed me her equipment. Cleanliness is one of the most important things to watch for in a tattoo shop. No piece of equipment should be reused without being disinfected. My artist chose disposable needles, which was an advantage. Basically, nothing should touch you that has ever been in contact with another person.

What I wanted was a small, simple (and cheap) design. The waiting room was full of books of designs, and posters of artwork. She also told me that I could design my own. When I finally decided, it was time for my appointment.

I thought seeing a tattoo being done would be bloody and ugly, but I
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